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# cutting the future

## Kevin Almond

Kevin graduated from the Royal College of Art Fashion School with an MDes (RCA) Distinction in 1988. Since then he has pursued a career in both industry and academia. This has included working as assistant designer for the couture house Norman Hartnell, designer for Enrico Coveri in Florence and as a freelance designer for companies such as Jacqmar, Parigi Soir, Wrens Uniforms and Freemans Catalogue, amongst many others. His teaching interests are centred on developing students' graduate collections from concept to cut and finish. His research interests explore themes of tragedy, loss, identity and suffering in relation to garment technology and creative pattern cutting, which he has recently started to document through a series of conference and journal papers.

His work is becoming internationally recognised with peer reviewed papers in journals and at conferences such as the International Foundation of Fashion Technology Institutes Conference, International Journal of the Arts in Society, International Journal of Fashion Design and Technology in Education and Society of Dyers and Colourists Online Journal. He is also Associate Editor of both the International Journal of the Arts in Society and the Society of Dyers and Colourists Online Journal as well as a Fellow of the Higher Education Academy. In 2009 he received the International Foundation of Fashion Technology Institutes (IFFTI) Award for best paper for 'You have to Suffer for Fashion'; an investigation into how the body has been distorted through the cut and construction of fashionable clothing.



Kevin's research includes examination of how dress responded to social change such as the exaggerated mourning dress of the Victorians and the explosion of Christian Dior's New Look in 1947, which was a direct reaction to the desecration of fashion in World War Two. Kevin is planning to submit for PhD by publication during the next two years. His research also analyses the results of fashion students' projects in comparison to seminal archives and collections of fashion garments. These include examining costume and discussion with curators at the Victoria and Albert Museum Fashion Archive, Platt Hall Archive, The Harrison Collection, Leeds City Council Costume Archive, Bath Museum of Costume Archive and The National Museum of Scotland.

His IFFTI paper 2009, 'You have to Suffer for Fashion', investigated how the body has been distorted to conform to the demands of fashion through garment cut and construction. The paper initially involved observation and handling of dress in the costume archives at the Victoria and Albert Museum. His research assessed the technology employed in realising particular garments and how they could be updated toward greater comfort and wear. The investigation enhanced technical knowledge, such as developing a greater understanding of the manufacture techniques developed in order to produce

garments that alter the natural shape of the human body. The investigation also emphasised the wider moral and health questions. It explored the shifting moral attitudes as to what is acceptable in fashionable dress and the health risks the consumer is prepared to endure in order to achieve a fashionable shape.

Another paper presented at The Fashion/Textile Association Conference 'Mapping the Future', 2009 and published in their journal: 'It Looks very Home-Dress-makey' investigated a seemingly derogatory term often levelled at students during toile and garment fittings. The term refers to a garment that has been cut and manufactured in a 'home-dress' way as opposed to professionally finished. The phrase also implies that the student's work is poor and amateurish in manufacture. The paper explored the term in relation to teaching strategies that enable final year fashion design students to successfully explore and realise concepts of manufacture and finish in respect to their degree collections of garments. It also examines the work of Jean Muir, a designer who was 'in love' with the process and craft of dressmaking, and always used very high quality materials in relation to attention to detail. Jean Muir's work is used as a catalyst to teach students about professional garments and empathising with the work of a particular designer in order

to develop their own conceptual and creative platform.

'The Tragic Descent of Serious Reaction to Misplaced Sentiment', a paper presented at the International Conference of the Arts in Society in Venice in 2009 and published in their journal. The paper investigates how Victorian society appropriated mourning dress in response to Romanticism overtly sentimental reactions to loss and death. His current research paper published in The International Journal of Fashion Design and Technology in Education in 2010 is called 'Insufficient Allure: The luxury and cost of Creative Pattern Cutting'. The research investigates how creative pattern cutting pushes the boundaries of fashion design. Patterns produced are often conceptually dynamic and therefore need to be placed imaginatively onto fabric, yet the significance of the pattern cutter's role is often marginalised in respect of design and 'glamour'. The paper examines creative cutting from final year fashion students. It celebrates the students' individual philosophies towards the creative cut and examines how the industry promotes pattern cutting to students as a viable career option. This is achieved by emphasising the potential for recognition in the fashion industry for pattern cutting. The paper concludes that the role of the pattern cutter can have as much significance and glamour as the designer despite the latter's seemingly dominant role.

The allure of pattern cutting can be realised through creative satisfaction and design integrity. The paper also discusses the realistic and commercial cost implications in the production of creatively cut garments and suggests pragmatic ways to maintain luxury with cost effectiveness.